Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA Full visiting board to Nottingham Trent University

Date of visiting board: 13 March 2025
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 2 May 2025

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1 **Details of institution hosting courses**
Nottingham Trent University
School of Architecture, Design and the Built Environment Arkwright Building
Goldsmith Street Nottingham
NG1 4BU

https://www.ntu.ac.uk/

2 **Courses offered for validation**
Architect, Level 7 Degree Apprenticeship MArch: PGDip

3 **Head of School & Course Leads**
Gavin Richards
Head of Architecture

Guillermo Garma Montiel
Architecture Programme Manager

Anthony Dalby
L7 Architecture Apprenticeship
Course Leader

4 **Awarding body**
Nottingham Trent University

5 **The visiting board**
Daniel Goodricke   Academic/Chair
Jenny Harper   Academic Vice Chair
Jon Phipps   Practitioner
Tracy Flanagan   RIBA validation manager

6 **Procedures and Themes and Values for Architectural Education**
The visiting board was carried out under the RIBA Procedures for Validation
and Themes and Values for UK and international courses in architecture
(published September 2021, and effective from September 2022); this
document is available at www.architecture.com.

The timetable was adapted and agreed between RIBA and the NTU ahead of
the visit.

7 **Proposals of the visiting board**
On 2 May 2025, the RIBA confirmed conditional validation of the following
course/s:

Architect, Level 7 Degree Apprenticeship MArch: PGDip (Part 2 and Part 3)

A revisiting board will take place at a date to be agreed between the
University and the RIBA.

8   Standard requirements for continued recognition
Continued RIBA recognition of all courses and qualifications is dependent upon:

i   external examiners being appointed for the course

ii   any significant changes to the courses and qualifications being submitted to the RIBA

iii   any change of award title, and the effective date of the change, being notified to the RIBA so that its recognition may formally be transferred to the new title

iv   submission to the RIBA of the names of students passing the courses and qualifications listed

v   In the UK, standard requirements of validation include the completion by the of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department

9   Academic position statement (written by the school)
We believe Nottingham Trent University's BArch (Hons) Architecture and MArch in Architecture courses provide students with the professional knowledge, architectural understanding, environmental consciousness and practical skills that will allow them to face the challenges of the twenty-first century. The global awareness of humanity's impact on the environment requires a change to the way human activities are performed in all societies. In architecture, the importance of the users' wellbeing, climatic and environmental considerations, the professional and ethical responsibilities of the architect and the effect of technological innovations have increased the contextual complexity in which architects exercise their careers. To respond to these challenges, architects require to cultivate a deeper understanding and knowledge of multiple themes: socio-cultural, historical, environmental, wellbeing and professional issues, in order to design architecture that can become a positive force of change in the world.

Areas of exceptional activity: We consider that the areas of exceptional activity in NTU's architectural courses are aligned to two main themes that shape our ethos: Architectural Practice and Architecture & Wellbeing.

1. Architectural Practice
The core aim at the heart of the architecture courses at NTU is to produce graduates that have the knowledge, skills and understanding to become an asset to modern practices at the end of their studies. This aim is aligned with the University's central values of producing graduates who are 'industry ready' and to enrich society by contributing to its environmental, social and cultural development. To achieve these goals, our graduates work towards developing excellent technical and environmental knowledge to address the evolving climatic circumstances of the twenty-first century. In addition, the professional skills developed at undergraduate level prepare our graduates to deal with the demands of architectural practice, while at postgraduate level students develop specialist knowledge by taking part in advanced research led by our Professoriate. By undertaking practical projects and producing realistic designs and outputs, the architecture courses at NTU, strive to develop graduates who are highly employable and ready to enrich society in architectural practice.

2. Architecture & Wellbeing
We believe that the architecture courses at NTU excel in the integration of wellbeing as a core theme in our pedagogic endeavours, pastoral support and

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within our collaborative staff and student community. From the outset, students are introduced to issues of social sustainability in their projects and with reference to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (in particular, 3, 11 and 13). By Year 3, well-being, the city and environmental concerns become core themes in the design atelier briefs; these themes run in parallel in other supporting modules. At postgraduate level, students are challenged to explore design methodologies that allow them to elaborate architectural enquiry responsive to wellbeing matters, and socio-cultural and sustainable future contexts. We consider the wellbeing of our student and staff community to be of utmost importance and the pastoral support for our students is well-structured and of excellent quality. Our staff-student communication channels are effective in resolving emerging issues; staff and students are continuously encouraged to feedback on both curricular issues and matters of wellbeing – staff have won NTU awards for pastoral support. We are currently developing a research strand, running co-creation projects with our students and alumni, whereby student research is informing future curriculum developments.

Our aim is to develop the theme of well-being across our pedagogy, pastoral support, the student-staff community and co-creation projects to make our architecture course(s) the leading centre for 'sustainable well-being' in the UK. Teaching and Learning Features: NTU has a well-established learning and teaching philosophy that places students at the centre of the learning and teaching experience. The programmes provide a safe, inclusive learning environment where students can be creative by experimenting, taking risks and developing architectural ideas through dialogue and debate with the teaching staff. The courses use collaborative Student-Centred Active Learning Environments with Upside-down Pedagogies (SCALE-UP) whenever possible to create a stimulating learning experience aimed at closing the attainment gap. The architecture courses are based in the Newton – Arkwright complex, which is located at the heart of Nottingham's City Campus, hence the institution's civic position defines the urban nature and focus of our projects. The key principles that form our area of excellence have been weaved within the courses' four strands of knowledge: Design (Dsg); Context, History & Humanities (CH&H); Technology & Environment (T&E);and Professional Skills (PS).

We have integrated essential knowledge relevant to modern practice in the T&E and PS strands: for example, climatic and environmental concerns, health and safety principles and the rise/use of new technologies. The modules within these strands work in unison with the design projects to deliver the necessary knowledge and understanding to address creatively the challenges of modern practice, the construction industry and global environmental concerns. Distinction between Part 1 and Part 2: The BArch and MArch curriculum is centred around design, which is complemented by three strands of architectural knowledge – CH&H, T&E, and PS. At undergraduate level, students are gradually empowered to pursue a personalised learning experience by choosing a distinctive direction based on the selection of briefs, research topics and representation techniques. The culmination of the students' journey is the final design project in Year 3, which provides the platform to synthesise technical, environmental, tectonic, theoretical and experiential knowledge in the design of a medium/large scale project. The personal choices serve as scaffolding for the students' transformation into independent learners and responsible designers. This student-centric approach facilitates the fulfilment of the course's aims of

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producing Part 1 graduates with a design ethos that enables them to comprehend the current complexities of the world and to develop a sensitivity for other cultures and communities. At postgraduate level, students develop a deeper critical position based on a studio centred research environment responding to complex contexts such as socio-economic inequality and the climatic emergency. They are encouraged to adopt an architectural position that questions the production of new, diverse and inclusive architectural typologies and spaces. This is informed by research from our Professoriate, which helps students understand current practices within global, national, and local contexts. The MArch Year 1 is based on experimental design briefs within urban contexts, and projects are developed using challenging design constraints and technological exploration. In Year 2, students design a large-scale project that focuses on the comprehensive resolution of all aspects of a scheme – compositional, functional, experiential, tectonic, and environmental. Whereas the BArch focuses on addressing the challenges of the near future, the MArch explores themes connected with the future evolution of the profession, for example, the role of AI and digital technologies. The aim of the MArch course is to develop students who can critically and systematically explore through research a personalised design methodology in response to the current and future challenges the discipline faces.

10   Condition

Conditional validation has been recommended for the following reason:

As per the RIBA Procedures for Validation, for new courses approaching initial validation only, or (exceptionally) where student numbers in a school are smaller than usual, the RIBA regards a portfolio sample of 10 students to be the minimum number required to make a visiting board viable and therefore to award full validation.

A revisiting board will take place at a date to be agreed between the University and the RIBA.

11   Commendations

The Board made the following commendations:

11.1   The School supports the University's mission to change learners' lives, shape their futures and equip them with the knowledge, skills and behaviours to provide practical solutions to real world challenges. The Board observed evidence that the apprenticeship route is delivering social mobility and experiential learning to apprentices, and this was recognised and valued by industry as per RIBA and ARB priorities. There was a consensus amongst stakeholders that the apprenticeship is an exemplar alternative route into the profession.

11.2   The Board commends the support of individual apprenticeship journeys. The route and curricula has proven agile and flexible, and extends various types of support to ensure that apprentices meet their potential and define and realise career trajectories. The Board would also like to commend the academic team, workplace mentors and workplace tutor (university mentor) in working together to ensure apprentices get the support that they need.

11.3   The Board commends the extent to which the design thesis projects fully integrate technological and environmental solutions.

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12   Action points
The visiting board proposes the following action points. The RIBA expects the university to report on how it will address these action points. Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

12.1   The School must ensure that design thesis projects employ a wider variety of exploratory methods, as appropriate. This would include the testing of ideas through hand drawing, and physical and digital model-making accompanied by critical reflection.

12.2   The School must ensure that design thesis projects contain sufficient narrative and rationale development, and that all drawing content is captioned.

13   Advice
The visiting board offers the following advice to the school on desirable, but not essential improvements, which, it is felt, would assist course development and raise standards. The board advises the school to consider input from co-professionals, e.g. structural engineers, into the curriculum to further enhance design studio teaching.

13.1   While the Dissertation/Research Methods module (DESN40002) permits two submission formats, the Board recommends that the alternative format is extended to include practice-led research methods supported by experimental, speculative and artefactual outputs as part of apprentices emerging creative practice.

13.2   The Board recommends that the academic position statement and school appraisal for any future full validation board makes explicit the pedagogical and experiential nuances of the apprenticeship route.

13.3   The Board recommends the School formalise any industry advisory boards and/or employer liaison forums to best inform future curriculum development.

13.4   The Board recommends the School consider aligning the Management, Practice and Law (DESN30011) module with the design thesis project. This will allow apprentices to better evidence applied knowledge of such principles, for example initial planning considerations.

13.5   The Board identified an opportunity to enhance student portfolios by better evidencing a knowledge of commercial understanding, whole life costs, place making and spatial resolution.

13.6   The Board recommends that the School remain alert to opportunities for authentic inquires for both assessment and scholarship purposes as presented by government initiatives, for example East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA).

13.7   While the Board acknowledge that architecture apprenticeships are heavily regulated, the School should consider using a consistent set of assessment

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criteria to ensure apprentices understand how and where criterion will be assessed. For example, the KSBs are a single standard for use across Part 2 and Part 3. This will allow apprentices to fully understand their performance and attainment.

14   Delivery of Graduate Attributes
It should be noted that where the visiting board considered graduate attributes to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or an attribute clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a graduate attribute was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

Graduates Attributes for Part 2
The Board confirmed that all of the Part 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Architect, Level 7 Degree Apprenticeship MArch: PGDip (Part 2)

15   Review of work against themes and values
It should be noted that where the visiting board considered the Themes and Values to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or a T&V were clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a T&V was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

Themes and Values for Part 2.
The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the Architect, Level 7 Degree Apprenticeship MArch: PGDip (Part 2).

Delivery of Professional Criteria for Part 3
The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the Architect, Level 7 Degree Apprenticeship MArch: PGDip (Part 2 and Part 3)

16   Other Information

16.1   Student numbers (from the School) 2024/2025
2019-2020 (4) Graduated
2020-2021 (1) Graduated
2021-2022 (5) Cohort
2022-2023 (6) Cohort
2023-2024 (5) Cohort

16.2   Documentation provided.
The department provided all documentation as required by the procedures for validation.

17.   Notes of meetings
On request, the RIBA will issue a copy of the minutes taken from the following meetings. These notes will not form part of the published report but will be made available on request. The full set of notes will be issued to the next full visiting board.

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- Budget Holder/Course leaders
- Students
- Head of Institution
- External Examiners